

News from SALEM COUNTY Office of Public Information

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FREEHOLDERS PASS RESOLUTION OPPOSING GOVERNOR'S PROPOSAL TO ELIMINATE THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

(SALEM, NJ)—Freeholder Director Lee Ware, Deputy Director David Lindenmuth, and Freeholder Bruce Bobbitt today announced that the Board of Chosen Freeholders unanimously approved a resolution urging the Governor and Legislature to reject the proposal to eliminate the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

"Salem County is the Garden Spot of the Garden State and we need our Department of Agriculture for the County to remain that way," said Freeholder Director Lee Ware. "Every license plate proudly displays that we are the Garden State, so how can the Department that supports this designation be eliminated? I appreciate the Governor's efforts to cut costs, but it should not come at the expense of our farming community. The Department of Agriculture is the thread that holds our farming community together."

According to the resolution, New Jersey's farmers and farm crops directly contribute \$924 million to the State's economy; the State's total agricultural and food industry total expands to \$82 billion through processing, packaging, retail sales and other harvest values.

"Our farmers are the backbone of Salem County, as well as the State, and we must support them so they can compete in today's market place," said Deputy Director Lindenmuth. "The Department of Agriculture helps market New Jersey produce and related products all throughout the country with our 'Jersey Fresh' branding. Their efforts are invaluable to our farming community. We are proud to stand up for our farming community and fight to keep the Department of Agriculture."

Governor Jon Corzine proposed the elimination of the Department of Agriculture, along with the Department of Personnel and New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth Commission, in his 2008 Budget Address delivered to a joint-session of the New Jersey Legislature on Tuesday, February 26th as a means to help the State deal with its mounting debt and budget crisis.

"We understand that tough times call for tough measures, but our farmers have it tough already," said Freeholder Bruce Bobbitt, Chairman of the Public Works Committee. "We have worked as a State and a County to preserve farmland, but we need the Department

of Agriculture to preserve the farmer so that the land we preserve can continue to generate crops. We are going to be working to develop a coalition of counties to go to the State House and fight to keep the Department of Agriculture."

The resolution will be sent to the New Jersey Third District Legislators, Senate President Richard Codey, Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts, and Governor Jon Corzine, as well as all 20 other counties.